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18th Acquisition Research Symposium Explores Synergy, Technology in Acquisition Strategies

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Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California

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Naval Postgraduate School and Acquisition Research Program (ARP) leadership, clockwise from top left, NPS President retired Vice Adm. Ann Rondeau, ARP Principal Investigator Dr. Robert Mortlock and Acquisition Chair retired Vice Adm. David Lewis, welcome keynote speaker Ms. Stacy Cummings, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (Acting) to kick off the 18th symposium.

Under the theme of “Creating Synergy for Informed Change,” the Naval Postgraduate School’s (NPS) Acquisition Research Program (ARP) held the 18th Annual Acquisition Research Symposium May 11-13 focusing on exchanging the latest in acquisition-based research and to collaboratively discuss solutions that furthers both warfighter capability and the development of future acquisition leaders.

ARP was established in 2003 to provide a platform for innovation and problem solving in the ever-evolving world of Department of Defense (DOD) acquisition strategies. It provides the current information and analytical effectiveness needed to deliver capabilities to America’s warfighters.

“Defense acquisition is a critical enabler in getting capabilities across the finish line to the warfighter, and this Symposium is a key part of improving that process,” said retired Vice Adm. David Lewis, NPS’ Chair of Acquisition. “It brings academia, practitioners, and operational personnel who are

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innovative thought leaders, and who have practical experience to think through the hard problems we face, and collaboratively discuss solutions that furthers both acquisition research and the development of future acquisition leaders.”

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During her keynote address, Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (A&S) Stacey Cummings emphasized the priorities of the President and the Secretary of Defense as renewing America’s advantages that include defending the nation, taking care of its people, and succeeding through teamwork—which she said aligns with what A&S and acquisition research does.

“Embedded in these priorities, are calls for innovation and modernization, as well as enhancing and maintaining force readiness,” said Cummings. “Keeping pace with advanced and persistent threats in today’s dynamic environment depends on taking a hard look at our acquisition portfolios and ensuring we have the right balance of capabilities for the future. Simply stated, our ability to achieve these priorities depends on getting acquisition and sustainment right.”

To help achieve those priorities, the Symposium hosted than 800 acquisition professionals consisting of senior leaders, warfighters, policymakers and researchers from across government, industry and academia, many of which presented research and findings aimed at getting acquisition right.

“We had approximately 18 different research panels each highlighting a specific area of acquisition sciences, from program management to contracting,” said Professor of Practice Dr. Robert Mortlock, who serves as the principal investigator of the ARP. “We had an amazing group of panel chairs and distinguished leaders discuss how to navigate emerging technologies through the complex transition into our warfighting system—often referred to as the valley of death. Esteemed faculty and student researchers presented impassioned research done in acquisition sciences that can bridge the valley of death to bring AI, additive manufacturing, 5G, and all of that emerging technology into the hands of our warfighter at the speed of relevance.

“The symposium helps us forge a connection between applied research and education,” continued Mortlock. “The panels and research filter into the NPS classroom and into updated curriculums, which in the long term produces leaders who are well educated in critical thinking and problem solving to get through complex issues.”

Current acquisition research experts had the chance to observe future innovators of acquisition research as NPS students presented their research projects that could shape the future of defense acquisition. This included earned value management analyst Symantha Loflin from the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA), who analyzed the impact on contractor business system approval and disapproval due to a Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) clause as she studied Risk and Opportunity Management at NPS via distant learning. She used this research to improve the efficiency and output of glove production for essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I’m using my education from NPS to build up the industrial base, bringing back manufacturing to the United States by Americans for Americans,” said Loflin. “I was able to not just use my earned value management experience, but also my production quality and manufacturing experience to provide for the government team.”

Some panels talked about improving the speed of the acquisition process through awarding contracts more efficiently. Other panels explored the benefits of acquisition technology not only to bring the latest cutting-edge technology to the warfighter, but also to expedite making acquisition decisions

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based off AI, IT or modeling data.

“As someone who has spent over three decades in Navy acquisition and an even longer period fascinated by data and data analytics, what [the Symposium’s] presentations, their analyses and findings may lead to are exciting,” said **Jill Boward**, Executive Director, Program Executive Office for Integrated Warfare Systems (PEO IWS), while hosting a panel about better decision-making through technology.

“These are exciting times to use data and technology to make better decisions, and we're going to need all of these decision tools and advanced analytics today and in the future to outpace our adversaries,” she added.



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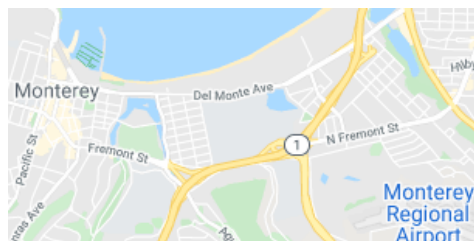
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